

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Khatam Sharif

شيخ ابو سعيد ابو الخير

In honour of the venerable

Shaykh Abu Sai'd Abu al-Zhayr®

Ego Vs Soul

There was once a very arrogant man called Everyman, who lived his life only to satisfy his desires. One day he was walking alone down an alley when he was suddenly stopped by a stranger. Everyman gave the stranger a nasty glance, showing his displeasure at being stopped, he arrogantly shouted, *"Don't know you and don't want to know you, whatever you want to say make it quick, I'm busy!"*

With no expression whatsoever on his face, the stranger replied, *"I am the Angel of death and I have come to collect..."*

Everyman's face turned pale and his voice wavered as he began to plead relentlessly that something could be done, but the Angel of death remained unmoved, *"I am not here to negotiate, unlike you I do what I was created for."*

The arrogance that had been apparent in Everyman had all but disappeared; he now cried and beseeched the Angel of death, *"Please, grant me a week. I have never had the opportunity to think about good deeds, never mind actually doing any. Please, ask God if He can give me some time, or else my life will have been wasted."*

"This is most unusual but I will ask," replied the Angel of Death, a little later he turned back to Everyman saying, *"I will return in seven days."*

With only a few days of his life left Everyman had a dream, he visualised two energies locked in battle with one another. One appeared very powerful as if it was a wrestler. In comparison, the other energy looked very weak, like a feeble person

who could hardly stand. The powerful energy addressed Everyman and said, *“Many thanks to you, you fed me all my life and I am in a healthy state. I am your nafs (ego).”*

The feeble energy also spoke to Everyman, saying, *“I am your spiritual side. If only you had given to me, one tenth of what you have been feeding your ego; today I would have been able to stand up to him and defend you. Alas, you neglected me all your life. However, do not despair for despite my weakness I am going to fight against your ego for you.”*

Just like the body needs food, there are also the needs of the spiritual side. The angelic voice in you is saying ‘Feed me, I am hungry’. Listen to that voice also, because if you were to ignore it, then it will become weaker and weaker.

Imam Ghazali ®

In complete despair Everyman thought, *‘How can it be possible for my spiritual side, which is so frail it cannot even stand up, battle against this giant of a monster I have created. All my life I followed my ego and fed it, and the little good deeds I did, I only did to show off. Now there is no hope for me because no matter what good I do, it will feed my ego, as it will be for the wrong intention.’*

Regardless of the tricks of his ego, Everyman did many pious and charitable deeds to make amends, constantly being reassured by his spiritual side that it was there to help him. At the prescribed time the outcome was akin to that in the well-known story of David and Goliath; with the goodness to feed it the valiant spiritual side fought against the giant ego and eventually saved Everyman, ensuring he entered Heaven.

Introduction

The human body houses two forces; one is the ego and the other the soul. However, there is an imbalance between these forces and so there is a constant confrontation between the two. If the ego wins then all actions and life itself is lived in accordance to the lower desires. However, if the soul wins then every action is done with Allah Almighty in mind, nothing is done heedlessly.

Rasulullah (S) said, *“A man will come on the Day of Judgment and he will be gigantic in size, yet his weight before Allah will be less than the wing of a mosquito.”*

This man will have no value, because whatever he did in his life was for the fulfilment of his ego.

Therefore knowing that the ego causes such destruction that it can stop us from reaching Heaven, we may enquire, why has such a devastating ‘thing’ been placed inside us? What is the purpose of such a thing, whose sole purpose is to keep us from reaching the Divine Presence?

It is true that if we had no ego we would be sinless like the Angels. However, this was not what Allah Almighty wanted, He chose to create Man and give him a *nafs*.

No other means may take mankind from the lowest level to the highest. Allah created nafs and gave them to man and Allah never creates without wisdom. He said, 'I created the children of Adam (as) to be My Deputies'.

Shaykh Nazim Sahib (q)

It is a fact that no creature is more dangerous and powerful than our ego, and yet no creature is more useful to take us from the lowest level, to the highest. If we truly contemplate upon this, this point alone is enough for us to understand that we must use this *nafs* to reach the Divine Presence.

To use the *nafs*, we must firstly be aware that it exists within us, and then gain an understanding about its characteristics, which will make us aware of its tricks and hence we can endeavour to correct our faults. However, it is human nature to look at the faults of others and neglect looking at oneself. For someone who is asking for a way to perfection, must begin to blame himself. He must look to his own imperfections, without looking to the imperfections of others.

One such man of God who took every breath in complete awareness and reached perfection, was Shaykh Abu Sai'd Abu al-Khayr ®. He is best described by Shaykh Attar ® as the Master who lived his life finding his own faults.

Abd al Samad ®, a very dear *murid* of Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® recalled, *"I had been travelling for a while and had not been in the presence of my Master, and so missed my Shaykh's sohbat, which truly pained me."*

When Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® heard of this, he said, *"Even if you had been away ten years, my message you can write on a finger nail, the summary of all my teachings is this one point. Sacrifice your nafs."*

Childhood and early potential

Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® was born in 978 CE in the city of Mayhana in the province of Khorasan, northeast Iran. His father was a chemist by profession and was called Shaykh Abul Khayr ®, a Sufi and a lover of the *Awliya*.

Shaykh Abu Sai'd's ® father was a great admirer of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi ®, and so when he built a new house, he decorated all the walls with various images of him. Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® was only a child at the time and so asked for a room of his own, which he began decorating, by writing 'Allah' all over. When Shaykh Abul Khayr ® saw this; he asked why he had done this, as this was not the behaviour of a child. Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® replied, *"O father, you put the name of someone you love, and I put the name of someone I love."*

This was one of the many indications of the great and immense potential Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® possessed; resulting in Shaykh Abul Khayr ® taking him to Shaykh Abu Muhammad Anzi

al Ayyari ®, who became his first teacher teaching him the Holy Qur'an and the Arabic language.

So, he began to study all the different sciences with different *ustads* and *Shayukh*, and his potential and calibre was noticed by many prominent *Awliya* including Shaykh Bashir Yasin ® and Shaykh Abu'l Qasim Gurkani ®. Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® narrates his meeting with Shaykh Abu'l Qasim Gurkani ®;

"When I was learning the Holy Qur'an as a young boy, I went with my father to pray Jummah. On the way, we had the blessed opportunity to do ziyarah of Shaykh Abu'l Qasim ®, who was now an old Shaykh. My father was very close to Shaykh Abu'l Qasim ® and so was told, 'I do not want to leave this place empty after I go. I am looking for someone to take care of things but no one can carry this responsibility, but after seeing your son, I now have hope. After Jummah bring him to me, insha Allah from this boy a lot of benefit will come.'

After praying Jummah, my father took me back and we sat in the Shaykh's room. In this room there was a very high cupboard, and strangely Shaykh Abu'l Qasim ® asked my father, to place me onto his shoulders so that I may reach the highest shelf and bring down a piece of bread. My father did as the Shaykh requested and as soon as I touched the bread, it became warm.

Upon seeing this Shaykh Abu'l Qasim ® broke the bread into two pieces and whilst crying, he gave one piece to me and kept the other. My father asked, 'O Shaykh, pardon my boldness but I too would have liked to share from this tabaruk.'

Shaykh Abu'l Qasim ® replied, 'I put that bread on top of that shelf thirty years ago, and have been waiting for this sign, for someone to touch it and it becomes warm. That is the person who has the naseeb to carry on our responsibility and it is your son who has this naseeb, and this cannot be shared. No other can carry such spirituality what your son has the naseeb to carry. O Abul Khayr, you must look after this child, from him a lot of benefit will come for the world.'

Shaykh Abu'l Qasim ® then turned to me and said, 'Not for one moment should you divert your attention from Allah Almighty; this is better for you than everything on which the sun sets.'

He then asked me if I desired to speak with Allah Almighty, to which I replied, more than anything else. So he gave me a couplet to recite in seclusion, saying 'Keep reading this and you will get to speak with Him.'

*Without thee O Beloved I cannot rest
Thy goodness towards me, I cannot reckon
Though every hair on my body becomes a tongue,
A thousand part of the thanks due to thee, I cannot tell.*

I kept reading this, until Allah Almighty opened my heart and I began to understand Divine mysteries."

Following this meeting with Shaykh Abu'l Qasim ®, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® was blessed with an understanding of Divine mysteries not expected in a young boy. The following incident shows the depth of understanding he had attained. One day Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® was instructed by his mother, to accompany his father and attend a *majlis* of *sama*, where poetry was recited without music. That evening, the following poem was recited at the *majlis*,

*God gives the darwish's love, and love is war
By dying, near and near to him, they grow
The generous youth will freely yield his life
The man of God cares not for worldly show*

This poem had an immense impact on the young Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, and so he enquired from his father what was the message of the poetry. His father informed him, "*It is just poetry. It has no significant meaning.*"

However, even at such a tender age Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® was blessed with an understanding of Divine mysteries, and so realised that there must be a purpose to this poetry, and so memorized it. Later he narrated; "*What I understood from this couplet was, that the whole purpose of Sufism is to unite us with our Creator.*"

The couplet explains that we are all in love with ourselves, but what is truly beneficial is to love someone other than ourselves, such as your Master. If you are in love with your Shaykh, then the ego will slowly but surely die; hence, dying before dying. The ego is a barrier that is keeping us from connecting with Allah Almighty, and the only way of reaching Him is to let go of ourselves, as nobody can reach Him with their egos.

*"The greatest blessing is to escape from the ego because the ego is the greatest veil
between you and Allah Almighty and Glorious"*

Shaykh Abu Bakr Tamastani ®

Ego - Nafs

In every religion, every society, there are people who are involved in trying to control their ego. For example, politicians are aware from the beginning that they should not falter by following it, as any slipup may come back to haunt them when they are in an important position. Even though their objective is worldly, they try not to follow these desires as they will even destroy success in worldly terms.

Many religions complicate things in trying to control it. Hindus Sants will undergo huge amounts of difficulty, not eating meat, not getting married and having no joy in life. They perceive that by doing this they are in control of their ego. Similarly, Buddhists will deny themselves. Whilst their methods of practice achieve the overpowering of their desires; they do not attain the power to actually control and completely subdue it.

However, since Islam is a *din* of moderation, the process to overcome the ego differs. It is to purify the heart by ridding it off its desires, because Allah Almighty says,

Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his (one) body

This is why the *Awliya* continuously strive to attain the control of the ego, ensuring they have one heart; a heart turned fully towards Allah Almighty.

The common ideology is that to reach Allah Almighty, we begin by trying to understand and know Him. However, it is not so simple as explained by Shaykh Hakim al Tirmidhi ®, who said, *"You wish to know God whilst your ego subsists, but your ego does not even know itself; how can it know another?"*

Similarly, in the first chapter of *The Alchemy of Happiness*, Imam Ghazali ® poses the following question, *"Do you know yourself?"* and then explains that there is nothing nearer to a person than his ego. We may of course say 'I know myself, I have eyes, ears, nose etc', but we are only talking about our physical appearance, the question still remains, do we actually know ourselves?

Even our knowledge of our physical body is limited since we have to visit a doctor for all medical problems. Likewise, we also remain unaware of the fact that every part of our physical body is under the influence of the ego. It uses our senses for its own purpose; the eyes become a source of temptation by what they see, the tongue becomes very devious by what it utters etc, in fact we begin to worship our ego through our senses.

Have you seen the one whose god is his own ego?

Holy Qur'an 25.43

Shaykh Sahib (q) mentions, *"Grandshaykh ® once addressed me saying, 'O Nazim Effendi! I want to speak to you on a very important matter, for which you and all seekers must take the greatest care. Don't worship your ego as a God beside Allah Almighty. Ego-worship is the most dangerous deviation from pure faith: hidden idolatry.'"*

A person could do many good deeds and in a flash the ego will come and wipe away everything. Hence, it has to be dealt with in this life; otherwise the blackness of it will take away the soul, the *nur* of every action. Its devastation is such that after a lifetime of piety the person will still not gain closeness to Allah Almighty, resulting in him never really tasting real *iman*.

Shaykh Abu Hafs Haddad ® said that a seeker must suspect his ego at every moment, even though it is constantly trying to assure you that it will not oppose you. This is the practice of the *Awliya*, they begin by understanding the ego; becoming aware of its trickery. They are aware that if a person tries to progress but has not controlled and subdued it, he will make a slipup at the most critical time; as is the case of *Shaytan*.

Shaykh Abul Hasan Kharaqani ® said, *"There are two things of which I have not reached the end. One is the maqam of Rasulullah (S) the other is the deception of the nafs."*

The deception of the *nafs* is such that a person is not aware in what guise it is going to attack. It is like a chameleon changing in every moment, putting up a smoke screen as to confuse you of what is real and what is fake. However, it has a common trait that if understood and furthermore practiced, it can train one to see what is from the ego and what

isn't. Shaykh Sahib (q) explains, *"The ego gets excited very quickly like a child but if you give it something else it will still accept. However, what is from your heart will not let you rest, until you get onto the right path. It will keep on reminding you that you are not there."*

Subduing the Ego

Our Grand Masters explained how difficult it is to spot the ego; they say it is like a black ant, on a black rock, on a moonless night. Baba Farid ® narrates, *"One day, I asked my master, Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki ® for permission to do khalvat and go into chilla. He replied that there was no need as doing this could bring about unwanted fame. I informed my master my intention was pure and I was not trying to attract attention, but to try and control my ego. My master remained quiet. At that very moment, I thought what have I done? I am trying to suppress my ego and I have just contradicted my Shaykh. I could never forgive myself and for the rest of my life I have always thought, why I answered back."*

So yes! We will be constantly tricked, but to actually think for one moment we can slip its treachery is also a thought from the ego! Therefore, those people who are aware of its tricks use every opportunity where they have slipped to correct themselves, each time saying, *'You got me this time but next time, it will be harder'*.

What you cannot do is attempt to oppose it directly or challenge it, for it will devour you. In literature or in speeches it has been portrayed as a meek donkey just following its desires, but in actual fact this is far from the truth, Shaykh Sahib (q) says, *"Foolish people! They are thinking the ego is some sort of lamb and they can kill it. When you say these words the ego is like a dragon with 70,000 heads and they all look at you with anger when you say these words. They will swallow you so you should never say these words; you should say 'You are my friend'."*

The Awliya advise us not to provoke the ego, but negotiate with it. Imam Busiri ® said, *"The nafs is like a child, you do not stop it from doing things, you gradually wean it off."*

For example, if it says it wants to do something sinful, then a person should begin to negotiate with it by offering something it will still enjoy, but is less harmful. One should not provoke it by trying to do a holy act as this will only be the means to greater harm. Therefore the Awliya are teaching people not to challenge, but wean the ego from what it wants to something less harmful, you have to be tactful.

Up to this point it must be clear that to even think about tackling the ego alone, simply put is suicide! So the question is what is the key? What is the easiest method of emptying the heart of the desires of the *nafs*? As in any matter, when someone wants to learn a particular skill or trade, they approach a person who is a master in that skill, and in every case the masters are the Awliya.

A follower should reflect upon the point that he cannot understand his Shaykh, that his Shaykh is an enigma. If he has no idea of the reality of the one he often meets, sits with and listens to, then what chance is there for him to understand Rasulullah (S), and ultimately his Lord? This insight in the thoughts of a *murid* will increase the amount of connection with his Shaykh and kindle the feeling of love for his Shaykh.

Love is a very special quality and once a *murid* has love for his Shaykh, this will be the source of all goodness. That person will have to make very little effort in physical terms but a tremendous amount of progression will occur with that person's ego. This is because love for the Shaykh fills the heart of the person and gradually flushes out the negativity.

Due to this love, the *murid's* heart connects with the pure heart of his Shaykh and from this connection, the Shaykh, gradually in small doses, will begin to cleanse the heart of various bad characteristics.

*Love for your Master will do more to subdue your ego,
than all other efforts can collectively.*

Meeting His Master

Still merely a young boy, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® was now studying the sciences of *Hadith sharif*, and had met with many *Awliya*, but not with his Master. However, very soon events unfolded, which ultimately led him to meet with his Shaykh.

Once on his way home from school, a baker saw him carrying books and so asked, "*What book are you reading?*"

Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® answered with a name, whereas the baker replied, "*Real knowledge is what is hidden, you cannot attain it all through books.*"

Later when recalling this event Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® said, "*At this stage I did not understand what he was saying, as I was under the impression that I would get all the knowledge from my books, and yet he was saying there is knowledge beyond the books.*"

What may seem like an insignificant event was no doubt the catalyst that kindled the sparks, and soon after he met with a *majzub* named Shaykh Luqman ®, who in turn introduced him to his real Master, his guide on the spiritual path.

Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® narrates,

"Shaykh Luqman ® was a majzub Shaykh, who in the eyes of the people was crazy as he would deter people through his strange and erratic behaviour. One day I was passing the rubbish heap and as usual Shaykh Luqman ® was sat in the middle of the filth and dirt. When he saw me he picked up some filth and was about to throw it at me. I opened my chest and said, 'Bismillah.'

When he saw I did not react as any other child would have, he took my hand and took me to a Shaykh, who later became my Master."

Shaykh Luqman ® had tested the patience of Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, and understood that the reason this young child had shown no reaction was that he had not reacted according to the wish of the ego. Shaykh Luqman ® took Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® to a prominent Shaykh in the region, Shaykh Abul Fadhal ®; who became Shaykh Abu Sai'd's ® master.

In their meeting, Shaykh Abul Fadhal ® said to Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, *"Abu Sai'd 124,000 Prophets have come and told people to come to Allah Almighty. Those people who connected with this message from the Prophets began remembering their Lord. Gradually His name, which was on their tongues became imprinted on their hearts, and no longer needed to be repeated by the tongue."*

The words of Shaykh Abul Fadhal ® had an immense impact on Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, such that he became restless and could not sleep at night. He was constantly thinking in his mind, *"How do I reach that stage, when my heart is remembering Allah Almighty and experience what my Shaykh told me."*

The next morning, as per usual, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® went to see his teacher, Shaykh Abu Ali Faki ®, who was giving a *dars* on the *ayah*,

Say 'Allah' and leave them to amuse themselves in their folly.

Holy Qur'an 6.91

Shaykh Abu Ali Faki ® explained that when the heart is *jari* with *dhikr* of Allah Almighty, then Allah will give the *hukum* to deal with people. Listening to this *ayah*, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® understood this was the message Shaykh Abul Fadhal ® had given him the previous day; to say Allah and leave people to their situations. He then went into a *hal* and felt a door to his heart had opened. Upon noticing this, Shaykh Abu Ali Faki ® asked, *"O Abu Sai'd, where have you been the day before?"*

He replied with the name of Shaykh Abul Fadhal ®. Thereafter, he was told, *"Return to your Shaykh immediately, as your condition requires his tawajjuh."*

Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® returned to Shaykh Abul Fadhal ®, who told him to repeat 'Allah' with the tongue until it became imprinted on the heart. The method that Shaykh Abul Fadhal ® gave to Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, '*dhikr ul qalb, dhikr e khafi*', cleanses the heart and when the heart is clean, a person can see the ego coming before it can attack. By following this teaching Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® felt the presence of Allah Almighty in his whole being, and soon after he went into *khalvat*.

One day Shaykh Abul Fadhal ® said to Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, *"The time has come for you to return to your village. There you will be granted an opening."*

This instruction from Shaykh Abul Fadhal ® was the sign that Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® had completed his spiritual training; his heart was *jari* with *dhikr* of Allah Almighty. This was the indication from his Shaykh that Allah Almighty's *hukum* had come that Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® could now begin to work and bring about change in people. Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® did as he had been instructed by his Shaykh and received many blessings thereafter, even after the death of his Shaykh, whom passed away soon after.

Despite all these blessings that had been bestowed upon Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, he still felt in need of guidance. Hence, he made the intention to visit Shaykh Abul Abbas Qasab ®, and spent much time in the company of the Shaykh, learning how to control the ego. Even though the men of God spend their lives in complete accordance to Allah Almighty's will,

they still do not feel for one moment that they have taken complete control of their *nafs*, for this reason they keep a very watchful eye over it at all times. Also regardless of the fact that they themselves may be a *Wali*, they are still in need of the *tawajjuh* and guidance of other Masters to develop from.

A Shaykh once ordered his *murid* to visit Sultan al Arifin Shaykh Bayazid al Bastami ® before he departed for Hajj. A long and arduous journey later the *murid* arrived at the *khanaqah*, and after food and rest he met with Sultan al Arifin ®, who asked him, “*What does your Shaykh teach you?*”

“*O Master, my Shaykh teaches us, ‘When you receive, give thanks, and when you don’t, be patient’,*” replied the *murid*.

Sultan al Arifin ® smiled and said, “*The dogs of Bastam sharif do no different.*”

Shocked with such a response he blurted out, “*So what is it that you teach?*”

“*When we receive, we give thanks, and when we don’t, we give thanks,*” replied Sultan al Arifin ®.

After this the *murid* decided to delay his Hajj journey and instead return to his Shaykh. When meeting with his Shaykh he mentioned what had happened, and to his surprise rather than defend himself, his Shaykh went into a *hal*. After a while he came out of his state and told the *murid* to return to Bastam sharif and ask Sultan al Arifin ® for advice. The *murid* did as he was ordered and many days later arrived at Bastam Sharif, and once again sat before Sultan al Arifin ®, “*O Master, my Shaykh has sent me to ask you for some advice.*”

Sultan al Arifin ® angrily picked up a piece of paper and after scrunching it up, threw it to the floor. Completely baffled with this response the *murid* once again left for his Shaykh, who when meeting him asked, “*So what did Sultan al Arifin ® say to you?*”

“*O Shaykh, he did not say anything, nothing at all,*” replied the *murid*.

The Shaykh said that was impossible and that Sultan al Arifin ® must have said or done something. At this point the *murid* picked up a piece of paper and after scrunching it up, threw it to the floor, and said, “*This is all that he did.*”

The Shaykh again went into *hal*, and eventually when he came out explained to the confused *murid*, “*My son, Sultan al Arifin ® is teaching me to let go of everything and to become like that piece of paper, with no will of its own.*”

Soon after, this Shaykh passed away. Later it was revealed by other *Awliya* that he was stuck at a certain state, and it was only through the *tawajjuh* and guidance of Sultan al Arifin ® that he overcame this and reached his *maqam*.

Characteristics of the Ego

The Awliya know the different types of egos and can see the true nature of a person immediately. They see the defect and then immediately begin to rectify the disease. The cure could range from many things, but the seeker must possess certain qualities for the effects to work. Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® in many discussions describes the qualities required for a person to be free from the ego. He explains, *"No less than the ten characteristics which I mention must be present in a sincere disciple, if he is to be worthy of discipleship."*

If a person has these ten noble qualities then he may be able to one day control his dragon, the ego. He must be intelligent enough to understand his Shaykh's indications. He must be obedient in order to carry out his command. He must be sharp of hearing to perceive what his Shaykh is really saying. He must have an enlightened heart in order to see the greatness of his master. He must be truthful, so that whatever he reports, he reports truthfully. He must be true to his word. Keeping all promises he makes. He must be generous. He must be discreet, so that he can keep a secret. He must be receptive to accept his Masters advice. Finally, he must be chivalrous in order to sacrifice his own life for the mystic path.

Know that opposing the ego is the beginning of worship.

Imam Qushayri ®

Before opposing the ego you must first become aware of the types of traits it displays, there are countless, but the common are: it does not like change as change tends to mean you are trying to move it from its number one position. It loves to give orders, but hates to obey as it is also very lazy. It loves praise and hates criticism. It likes to make claims and is very devious. It is restless and never satisfied, always wanting more. It is miserly in every way possible. It uses intellect to confuse, Allama Iqbal ® explains that intellect is devious, it changes colour like a chameleon, but true love does not change colour. The ego is *hasad*, envious and jealous. It will never offer praise to others, instead it will try to belittle a person. It is not willing to let go of hatred and so uses anger as its fuel. It is a *nifak*, hypocrite, it makes a person do tricks and wear so many faces and become so many people that in the end that individual will not understand who he 'really' is.

A Shaykh knows which area the ego is coming from. It is a different area for everybody, and so the Shaykh will prescribe a different process of cure for each individual. A look from the Shaykh, or a handshake are signs that the Shaykh is working on a person's ego; burning away some of its *shaytani*.

Being a master, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® would constantly work on the state of his *murids*. It is noticeable from examples of his teachings that no two egos are the same, each person requires a different cure, hence the difficulty in correcting people. The same dose of medicine cannot be given to people as the egos are different. Being a master, he knew what the capacity of each person was, and what they required to assist them in working on themselves. Therefore his method of teachings varied to include many methods, but *sama* (spiritual poetry) was predominant.

When Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® commenced the practice of *sama* within Nishapur, he began to face opposition. Soon enough these people complained to Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi ®, who

replied to the people that they were free to take whatever action they deemed was necessary. Hence, the people saw this as a sign that they had been given the go ahead to martyr Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® and his *murids*. This frightened all the followers but none had the courage to speak directly to Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® about their apprehensions. On the other hand he himself did not show the slightest of concern regarding this matter. Instead, he called Shaykh Hasan ® and said, *"For breakfast, serve everyone boiled lamb heads, plenty of sugar, plenty of sweets and rosewater. Moreover, burn some incense and set all the food on a clean white cotton cloth in the middle of the city mosque, so those who talk behind our backs, can see that God's Hand feeds from the unseen."*

Although Shaykh Hasan ® did not have the means to arrange this meal for the 120 people who were at the *khanaqah*; he made his way to the market. He pondered whether to beg or return back and mention to the Shaykh that he had no provisions to purchase the food. He decided to stay and expected something will happen to take care of matters. The market closed and it became pitch dark, but still he remained there. Suddenly, a man approached Shaykh Hasan ® and asked, *"What are you doing here, there are no shops open."*

After listening to Shaykh Hasan ®, the man smiled, opened a bag and said, *"Take as much money as you need."*

The following morning the people were bewildered to see that the Shaykh and his followers were enjoying a luxury breakfast in the heart of the city. Angered by what they saw, they sent a message informing one of the tribal leaders, Abu Bakr Ishaq, who replied, *"Let them enjoy their last meal, tomorrow vultures will be eating them."*

After breakfast, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® said to Shaykh Hasan ®, *"Go and prepare the front row at the mosque for Jummah prayer for all the murids."*

The Imam of the mosque, Mufti Sai'd ® was one of the people who opposed Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®. Following the prayers, Mufti Sai'd ® was doing a lengthy *du'a* when the Shaykh stood to leave. Mufti Sai'd ® stared at Shaykh Abu Sai'd ®, hinting he thought it to be bad manners for him to leave whilst he was doing a supplication. Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® gave him a look that rendered him powerless, he felt as though he was a pigeon in the presence of a hawk. Following this exchange of glances, Mufti Sai'd's ® opinion had changed and he no longer wanted to be part of the ones who desired to cause harm.

After leaving the mosque, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® said to Shaykh Hasan ®, *"Go and get some pastries and take them to Abu Bakr Ishaq. Invite him to join us in the evening, so that he may break his fast with us."*

Abu Bakr Ishaq was very surprised by the message, because as far as he was concerned not a soul was aware of his *nafli roza*. He was also perplexed by the gift of pastries, as before he had gone to *Jummah* prayers, he had walked past a shop and desired these exact pastries. Realising that this was no mere coincidence, Abu Bakr's opinion of the Shaykh also changed, and so he sent a message to those people who opposed the Shaykh, saying, *"I am not going to cooperate with you in your plans to martyr the Shaykh and his followers."*

Abu Bakr Ishaq said to Shaykh Hasan ®, *"Say to your master, that Sultan Mahumud ® with one hundred thousand men and seven hundred war elephants could not defeat us; but your sweets have won us over, we are your servants."*

Shaykh Hasan ® related the message back to Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® who now spoke on the whole matter; he explained, *"Since yesterday you have been shaking from fear, terrified at being hung for being a Sufi. Yet it takes someone of the calibre of Shaykh Mansur al Hallaj ® to be hanged, real men are hanged, not phonies."*

He then asked the *qawall* to recite the following poem describing a 'real' *darwish*;

*To the battlefield come prepared
With an array of thought of self just follow us
Whether life is like water of fire, live happily
In the midst of it be content*

Conclusion

One day Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® went to the hammam and commented to Abu Muhammad, a close friend, *"This hammam is a pleasant place, why do think this is so?"*

Abu Muhammad replied, *"O Shaykh, it is because of your presence, and this is what makes it a blessed place."*

Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® replied, *"No, this is not the real reason. This is a pleasant place because all you need to remove the dirt is a jug of water and a towel, and even those do not belong to you."*

Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® was explaining the point of keeping yourself light, just like a person is born into this world free from possessions, we must leave free from possessions. Like a light traveller moving from one place to another, we should live our lives with little means as we too are travelling. This was the manner in which Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® lived his life; he was a master at knowing the ego and its trickery.

One day, Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® attended a gathering in a different village. The announcer wanted to give an introduction about the full background of the eminent Shaykh to the people gathered. The announcer asked the *murids* but was not satisfied with the amount of information and wanted to know more. Shaykh Abu Sai'd ® noticed all this and said to the announcer, *"Say nobody, son of nobody."*

*Until you become an unbeliever in your own self,
You cannot become a believer in God.*

Al Fatiha